

Killed on a Path to Heaven

One week ago, on Friday, Jan. 30, about 7:30 p.m., Jim Ham, 84, a volunteer at Life Care Center of Morehead, Kentucky, claimed the last of three straight victories in games of checkers with some residents and stood up to leave.

“I’ll come back tomorrow, and beat you again!” he smiled. He winked at his friends at the table and walked out the door. He was headed home to his apartment, about a four-minute walk away.

He never made it. Crossing busy U.S. Highway 60, he was struck by an automobile and killed.

The man who was a light in that nursing center for more than 15 years – volunteering 10 or more hours a day, seven days a week – was gone.



The news of his death was like a mule’s kick in the stomach to the staff, residents and families of Life Care Center of Morehead. He was a fixture that no one could imagine being gone.

“He always brought his smile, he always had hugs for everyone, he was always very positive,” Bill Hurst, the executive director, said. “We’re just sick, in a state of shock over this.”

The funeral was conducted on Monday. “We took a bus with 17 residents on it, and that was appropriate. Jim was always on it for outings,” Hurst said. “Anytime the bus started up, Jim was on it.”

Helping in that facility, you see, was Ham’s passion. A native of Kentucky, he moved to Chicago and worked there 45 years as a maître d’ in an exclusive private club. Upon retirement, he moved back to the bluegrass state and became a fixture in Morehead.

He passed his GED test at age 71, and was highlighted in Morehead State University’s *Faces in the Crowd* recognition program. He loved attending sporting events of the school, which is located adjacent to Life Care Center of Morehead.

And it was in that nursing center where he found fulfillment, and positively impacted countless numbers of people. He accompanied residents on doctors’ visits, assisted in social activities, delivered mail and checked in delivered goods to be certain vendors had filled their orders correctly. He was a greeter at the front door and assisted family members with carry-in items.

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His nephew, the Rev. Charles Hamm, offering the eulogy at the funeral service, referred to all that his uncle did for people at the nursing center, and asked, "Who's going to fill those shoes?" It was an appropriate question for one who left footprints on the hearts of the Life Care family there.

Ham, who never married, took great pride in his family. He enjoyed joking about the difference in spelling of the family's name – particularly after he completed the GED program. "I'm educated now, and they don't even know how to spell their name (others in the family spell it with two m's)."

He looked forward to family reunions, and while he didn't own a car, he would rent one to attend these get-togethers.

It was fitting on that Friday night that Jim Ham walked out the door of Life Care Center of Morehead on a path to meet his Maker after a day of serving God's children.

Through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:13-14 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter